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PROGRAM MAGAZINE

Issue #9 Autumn 1988

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GROUNDBREAKER

Since his days with Eugene Chadbourne and David Licht in the legendary trio Shockabilly, (Mark) Kramer, Bongwater's central figure, has been at the forefront of new music. Besides his many musical projects like Bongwater and B.A.L.L., and collaborations with such noisemakers as Jad Fair from Half Japanese, Kramer runs a bare-bones record label, Shimmydisc, which has released records by all of the aforementioned projects, and many others by the leaders in the field of improvised music. In addition, his production work in his studio, Noise New York, is attracting international praise. Recently, **WHPK's John Corbett** spoke with Kramer before Bongwater's Chicago performance, part of a mini-tour in preparation for a larger tour of Europe which is currently taking place.

JC: What are you up to?

K: I'm thinking of my one major disappointment of this year. I was pulling across the Midwest, and I saw these cigarette ads with this real macho fisherman, with a big beard, holding this bluefish. Have you seen them?

JC: No.

K: It's this guy, and he says something about cigarettes, and he's holding this big bluefish, which you don't see around here. They're in the Atlantic Ocean, right? So anyway, I go bluefishing two or three times every summer, but this year, I was so busy with Shimmydisc that I didn't get to go. But most of the fish are coming up with needles and stuff like that so we wouldn't have been able to eat them anyway. I'm not a gamester, I don't go out and just kill things ...

<<<A train passes by>>>

... I can assure you, that was not the

express

JC: That was the slow train.

K: Slow train to China.

JC: Where does this tour take you?

K: This tour began yesterday in Cleveland and will end Thursday night in Washington, D.C. We are privileged to play the 930 Club (in D.C.).

JC: Right now you're dividing your time between Shimmydisc and Bongwater.

K: Shimmydisc, Bongwater, B.A.L.L., and running Noise New York ... Shimmydisc takes up most of the time, I guess, because I don't have anyone helping me. I box 500 records to be sent out to radio stations, 200 to go out to press people all over the world—I do it all myself. It takes up a lot of time, but I don't have the money to afford anything else. I don't know how most record companies stay in business, to tell you the truth. I struggle to sell 5,000, but even then you don't really turn a profit. Also, I have this freaky thing about quality. I have them mastered directly to metal and then I spend a lot of money making sure there's not a smudge on any record.

JC: You do all your producing at Noise New York—Davey Williams, LaDonna Smith, Cinnie Cole ...

K: I don't think I've ever produced anything anywhere besides at Noise New York. Nobody's ever asked me to.

JC: What about the Butthole Surfers?

K: That should be clarified. Producing the Butthole Surfers is making sure they get the sound that they want. It's not going into the studio and telling them what

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CHICAGO'S ALTERNATIVE
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Pure Hype is WHPK's local music show, featuring the best in local alternative music and live performances by local bands. Pure Hype also promotes the shows taking place in Chicago every week, giving away tons of tickets for the very hottest shows, so that while you listen to the best, you can attend the shows of the best absolutely free. In short, Pure Hype is your guide to alternative entertainment.

Every week, Hype plays a wide range of local music, from classic bands like **Big Black** and the **Effigies** to the latest cassettes from local garage bands. Any local band that wishes to send a cassette or record to Pure Hype should send their material to Pure Hype, in care of the station. If the tape is good, it gets airplay. Local bands should not be intimidated; along with music ranging from the hardcore sound of the **Didjits**, to the poetry of **Algebra Suicide**, to **Straightjacketbazooka's** industrial noise, to the latest Wax Trax dance mix, tapes find their niche. In fact, cassettes receive the most airplay of any of these forms. The aforementioned bands are just the parameters of the sounds of Pure Hype.

Hyde Park bands, like the **Farmers**, the **Barbie Army**, and **Monica's Interval**, are most often played on Hype. These bands have progressed from playing small dormitory parties to playing at Cabaret Metro and releasing vinyl. Pure Hype has featured them every step of the way, from demo tapes to compilations (the **Farmers** and **Barbie Army** are the highlights of the recent Chicago compilation *It Came from Jay's Garage*) to finished product. All three of these bands have been regular guests on Hype, playing live once a quarter.

The **Farmers** have graduated from the tape-only format and have released a 7" single on **Pravda Records**. Hyde Park's hardest working band, they play somewhere in Chicago almost every weekend. In addition, they have toured to as far east as New York City and as far south as New Orleans. For those out there who have not yet seen this remarkable combo, their lineup is two guitars and a drummer, and their sound is surprisingly full given such a sparse collection of instruments. Some have called them a "punkabilly" outfit, based on the audience's tendency to jump up and down at the shows, but we consider

them more like classic rockabilly. Their shows are quite fun and well worth the trip—a recommended live performance.

Another band who recently ventured into the 7" format is **Urge Overkill**, with their "Lineman"/"Head On" single on **Touch and Go Records**. "Head On" sounds very much like early '70s efforts by **Neil Young**. "Lineman" is a cover of Glen Campbell's hit "Wichita Lineman," but Mr. Campbell would find this arrangement somewhat alien—it is doubtful that he would recognize it as his own song. The band has recently added a new drummer from Minneapolis, which ends a hiatus from local live appearances. Each time we see them, they sound more and more like an early '70s revival band. The power trio is based in Evanston and they're probably the best thing that's ever come out of there.

Hyde Park's own **Monica's Interval** released an album earlier this year, and will soon release a 7" as well. This single will feature their new drummer. After listening to their album and seeing them live, we definitely prefer the live drum sound, as opposed to their former affinity for the drum machine. **Monica's Interval** have become one of Chicago's premiere opening acts for nationally known bands. During the past six months, they have opened for **Robyn Hitchcock** and the **Egyptians**, the **Railway Children**, and **Devo**. An added facet of their live shows is the visuals—film strips and slides—that they employ; it enhances the performance rather than detracting from it. And, like the **Farmers**, these guys live in Hyde Park, so after you see them live, you can say hello to them on your way to class.

When the last Pure Hype round-up came out, we were still looking forward to the **Repulse Kava** single. Well, it came out, whereupon the band promptly broke up. Thankfully, they are now back in business, with a new drummer. The 7" is with the former lineup, and is fast, furious, and funky, with an intense

rhythm track. In the past, they've been likened on Pure Hype to the **Minutemen**, **Sonic Youth**, and **Scratch Acid** all at the same time.

Besides the aforementioned **Farmers** single, **Pravda Records** has recently released new vinyl—the **Slugs** lp *Non Stop Holiday* and the **Service's** latest effort, a 7" called "Sundowning." There's nothing fancy here; both bands are straight-ahead rock'n'roll, good Midwestern tunes without any extraneous influence. Two fine records. These two bands, along with another entry in this genre, **Eleventh Dream Day**, should be receiving substantial commercial airplay.

Underdog Records is featuring new releases from **Spongetunnel** and **Friends of Betty**. **Spongetunnel** is the product of a merger between **Sponge** and **Fudgetunnel**, two classic local bands, and the lp reflects this combination. The **Friends of Betty** wax is probably our favorite local lp of the year. Called *Blind Faith II*, it was released with handmade covers (attention, collectors), and arrived at WHPK with a flyer comparing them to **Sonic Youth**. This is a valid comparison, and when you consider that **Friends of Betty** actually play in tune—well, it's heady company indeed.

Instead of producing **Depeche Mode's** latest 12", local legend **Steve Albini** has decided to channel his considerable energies into his new band, **Rapeman**, which he formed with two former members of **Scratch Acid**, **Rey Washam** and **David Wm. Sims**. Although comparisons to **Big Black** are inevitable, careful attention should be paid to the live drum sound, because without **Roland**, the rhythm is far more worthy of analysis. **Albini**, iconoclastic to the end, has thus far played two local dates—on **Bastille Day**, and on **Mexican Independence Day**. A portion of their new ep, *Budd* (on **Touch and Go Records**), was recorded at the **Bastille Day** event at the **Exit**. The title song of this ep is about the Pennsylvania politician who blew his head off at a televised news conference, proving that **Albini** has brought some of the heart of **Big Black** with him to this new endeavor—namely, an obsession with this sort of subject matter.

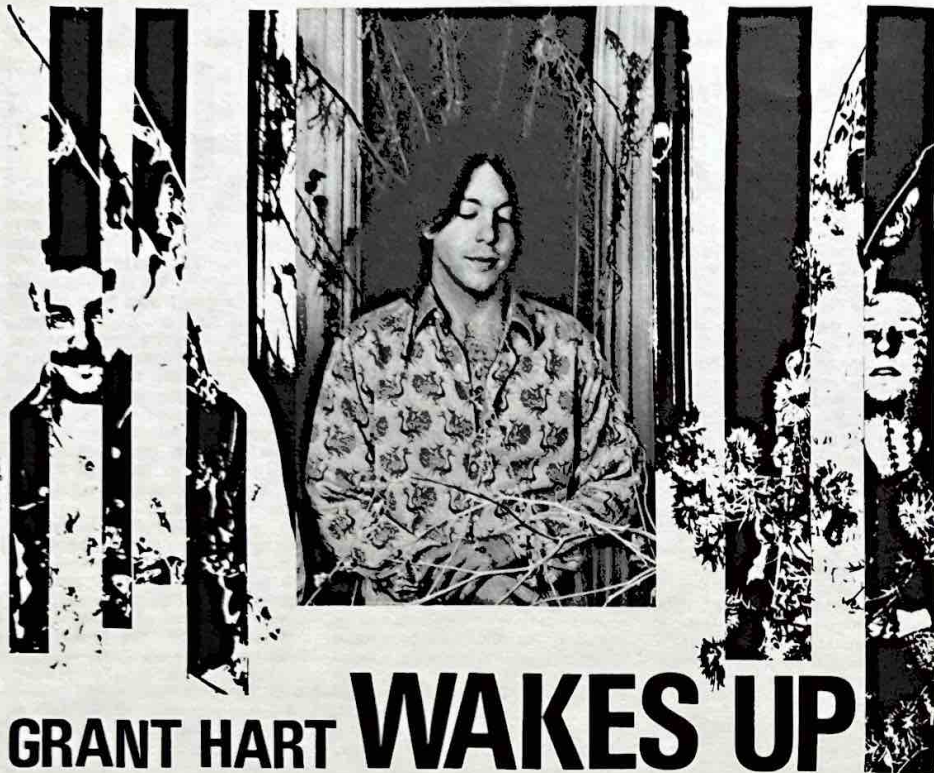
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GRANT HART WAKES UP

Grant Hart was spotted at the art reception for William Burroughs at Klein Gallery. He was in Chicago on the 21st of October, a day before his new band, the Swallows, opened for Game Theory at Cabaret Metro. Hart said, "This is a one-off trip. I'm here basically to see *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz* and look at William's new paintings, and we kind of picked up the gig as a means of killing three birds with one stone."

Following that reception, the Swallows gave a private performance in a basement on the Northside, after other concert plans fell through. The band is tight and abrasive, and very reminiscent of later Husker Du. *WHPK's Mark Swartz and Ben Evans* (with additional input from Jeff Barnes) spoke with him in a laundry room adjacent to the basement that the other Swallows were still jamming in.

MS: First of all, I want to ask you why you weren't playing drums. I think you're the most proficient drummer around.

GH: Basically, I'd done it for such a lengthy period of time. I had played drums, but I'd done other things up to that point. You see, with Husker Du, the longer it went on, the more I just became the drummer.

MS: You sort of broke the genre by singing in the first place. There are very few drummers that sing—I'm hard-pressed to think of one.

GH: It's a bit rare. It's kind of a difficult thing when that's all you do. It's kind of hard to expand past that when you're stuck in the back. And with me, the more material I was writing, the more I was playing it on an instrument that I didn't write the material on. That can be pretty hellish.

MS: How much do you think the Swallows have been influenced by Husker Du? I still notice your musical wall of noise.

GH: It's pretty dense. It's not lacking in any of the power. It might be more dynamic. I think that overall, it's a better rhythm section. I'm freer to do vocals.

MS: Was your drumming getting in the way before?

GH: It got to be a chore at different times.

MS: How did you find the people in the band? Give me a history.

GH: A few years ago, Johnny [Paul Joyce] and I worked together. He was playing bass for a band called the Magnolias and I produced their album for Twin/Tone records. We've been jamming with Brad for the last year and a half or so, and Burt's an old pal.

You see, Brad and John and I were playing before Husker Du broke up, and when Husker Du broke up, I was suddenly in another band as well ... I didn't have an opportunity to not be in a band for a while, and there were a lot of things I had to get sorted out for myself, even to the point of figuring out if this is what I really want to do. I was with that band ever since I was seventeen years old. I love music and I love to play and everything like that, but the last four years or so of Husker Du were just kind of perpetuating into something that got too big to control. It was something that was such a part of our lives that we didn't really have any power to say yes or no to it. Husker Du was bigger than the sum of its three members.

So I needed to take a break for a while, and John and Brad understood that and the three of them enlisted Vid to play drums; they started playing and started doing some gigs. And it worked out really good for them because everybody has more than one project, which is good. I don't want anybody to get into the situation I was in where the group becomes so unwieldy that you have nothing else to do, except continue.

BE: Do you feel like you're the celebrity member of the Swallows because you were in Husker Du?

GH: Well, that's one thing that we had to not be too deliberate about, come to a reckoning with, and that's why they all have other projects and I have other projects. I can't do what I have to do without them, and I can't think of three people I'd rather do it with. It's just good tone, good getting-along capabilities. I just feel we play very well.

MS: Is this "Grant Hart's The Swallows" or "The Swallows?"

GH: I don't like to get my name into things like that.

MS: The concert tomorrow lists the band as "featuring Grant Hart." What's the album cover say?

GH: Well, we haven't recorded an album as a band. The album will be like the single—it'll just list me. But we're going to do some recording by the end of the year. It's kind of hard to plan.

MS: I haven't heard anything off your new single, but what I heard downstairs sounds full of

angst, like, "No one cares for me ..."

GH: That's an old song by the band Love—it's purely a cover version. I like the song, I like where it goes, but I don't necessarily completely identify with the lyrics.

BE: How do you write songs for this band? Do you write with keyboards or guitar? Do you write them together or on your own?

GH: So far, on my own. See, they're playing songs on their own, and I guess it is a little bit of a monarchy as far as when I'm playing with them. It's generally a song I'm going to sing and pretty well must have written.

MS: Are you happy with the growth of your music, with the stages that developed and the end product? Or are you more happy with one stage or another? I mean, you've progressed from straight hardcore—what's the quote about Land Speed Record—you took as much speed as possible, covered as much land, and made a record. Now you've moved in the direction of pop.

GH: The thing is, around the time of *Zen Arcade*, the most radical thing a punk band could do at that time was to do pop songs.

MS: OK, so what exactly happened?

GH: To make a long story short, when we recorded the double *Warehouse*, it was just sort of a fifty-fifty split as far as song writing was concerned, as far as Bob and I.

There was increasing tension over my wanting to publish more songs. I still look upon myself more as a songwriter than an instrumentalist—a songwriter-vocalist. It seemed like it was a struggle in my own band for me to express myself. During the editing of *Warehouse*, the mixing and editing stages, Bob told me that I was only going to get nine songs out of twenty. You've got to understand the personalities of the members. I've spent a lot of years being very easily intimidated by Bob, and my growth as a songwriter was in spite of that. It just got to the point where it was so damn hard for me to get my points across.

Then I would be playing with these guys, before Vid came along to play drums, and that was frowned upon by the other members of Husker Du as being an extra-curricular thing that was drawing time away from what I could be doing for them. I worked really close with Run Westy Run for the first two years of their existence, producing and being the guitarist's daughter's godfather, pretty much being friends. I guess what happened is the three of us just spent so much time together that we really lost interest in each other.

I had a couple years where I had a habituation with opiates and that was kind of used as an overall excuse, which was a bit of bull, because people within the band and people within our circle knew about that situation well before it was used as a finger to point at me. Case in point: When I quit the band on the 16th of December I headed out of town, and next thing I heard, I had been fired because I was a heroin addict. And it really seemed unjust. Of course that's not a cause for the breakup, just an example of how the information was sent across. It was just a dirty fuckin' stab in the back, where it's kind of like a "No, you can't quit, you're fired"-type of thing.

Sometime later the fellows came over to my house talking about how they wanted to work and how they wanted to get things together and I said, "OK, if you really mean that, fine, bring your equipment over." They never did it. The last two years of the band, the only time we rehearsed was when we were just getting ready to go into the studio. I don't think this was directly because of being on a major label or something, but I think, somehow, something got corrupted. It wasn't ... It just didn't seem honest anymore.

MS: But I thought Bob Mould was producing bands while Husker Du was still together, wasn't he?

GH: Yeah, he was, and I did a few things.

MS: What were you doing?

GH: Oh, I did all the Otto's Chemical Lounge things, Magnolias, Run Westy Run, Blue Up, a couple of lesser projects. I was just putting a lot of time into something that I really didn't get compensation for in terms of pleasure. It's kind of weird, because, when I first started the band, where we ended up, I thought, God, that's where I'd like to be. But it's not a really healthy thing. There's a lot of freaks in the music business, and they don't give a fuck what you're singing about as long as they hear the bells in their ears when the cash register goes off. It's a difficult thing to put your finger on, but it became important to the wrong people for the wrong reasons in some ways.

MS: It sounds to me like you're referring to yourselves, and the fact that you signed on to Warner Bros. Wasn't your ability to command a larger sum of money the main reason for your move?

GH: It didn't help the band so much. A major label's fine. Your records are everywhere you want them to be and anybody that's looking for your records can find them. But also, hand-in-hand with that, you have people that really have no business listening to your music. Not to sound elitist or anything, but there

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HART

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are a lot of idiots out there that once in a while listen to good music. It just went from having a really nice underground crowd to, you know, a good conscious, thinking crowd, to wine coolers and Spuds MacKenzie. Some of the impact of the statement was a little washed away with the number of ears that were listening ... I don't know.

MS: So you're saying you regret the move?

GH: I don't regret it, but I learned some things through the move that I would have never suspected before that point, about what happens when your audience is just kind of there rather than won over to listening to you by the merits of your music.

MS: I guess you're pretty disillusioned. When I saw the Husker Du concert at the Riviera-I've never seen any of your concerts to compare it to, but all you did was ...

GH: ... was play Warehouse verbatim.

MS: ... was play Warehouse verbatim. You came back and played other things, but was that a statement on your move to Warner?

GH: No, it was sheer bullshit. I never agreed with that setup from the beginning. It was one of my two partners' ideas, and as with many of his ideas, they got kind of pounded into reality before anyone had a chance to look around. But I didn't think that was very fair to the audience that goes out and buys the record, and then goes out and buys a ticket to see the live show, and there's not much difference. That's really absurd.

JB: Do you have any idea about what Greg Norton and Bob Mould are up to right now?

GH: Bob is making tapes and kind of shopping them around. Greg is probably the happiest of us all. He's working record retail, and so he's real close to music. Greg got caught in the middle, because the primary tensions that were existing were tensions between Bob and myself, and a lot of the things didn't really occur on stage, but after the band was through playing. In situations like that, I'm a bit more ... I know how to turn on the gregariousness. I think I had more fun than anyone else in the band.

MS: Did Greg take Bob's side on a lot of things?

GH: Yeah, a lot of times, it was two against one.

MS: So how did you end up being the odd man out?

GH: I'll tell you, there were two non-junkies and one bad boy. There was me being in town. I just ended up being the odd man out. I remember discussing quitting for quite a while before it actually happened and being told, "We're going to go out on tour, we got a tour coming up, go out and make us some money." You know, that happened a few times to me in the history of the band, where all of a sudden, it was like, "Hey, wait, I was going to get out of this!"

JB: How did you feel about your performance on the "Late Show?"

GH: That wasn't an angle that I really sought after. Of the people who are listening to my music, the ones that really matter are generally already listening. It doesn't do me any good to have my music bottled in with whoever else performs in that type of venue. Joan Rivers was a nice lady and all that, and we were treated pretty fairly. I think, maybe, selective mass media is the key. I'm not saying to control the media, but to not let the media present you the way it sees you.

JB: To me, it seemed that Bob Mould was really nervous.

GH: I think sometimes people have problems ... TV is audio and visual, rather than what we're used to, audio and printed interviews ... Let's try to get out of this with as little slander as possible-I think that some people have an easier time of appearing nice than other people do. I think different faces are put on for the mass media in situations like that and the show was a whole scripted interview thing: Bob, you're the quiet one (right), Grant, you're the wild one (I guess so).

MS: They said this to you before the show?

GH: No, but they glean other interviews to get the combinations of question and answer, and I'm sorry, but sometimes the answers aren't the same for me every day. One day, it might be raining, and it's my favorite kind of weather on that day. The next day, it might be raining again, but now I'm sick of it. Or sometimes, I don't feel I'm wild, and I think the wild thing was just kind of mean ... Maybe a better word-and this might be flattering myself-a better word might be independent, or more free. That's my ultimate goal-to be as free as I can be.

BE: When you first started, did you want to get as large an audience as possible? What was the point when you said, "Well, we got our audience?"

GH: In any of the arts, as soon as you take your guitar and put it in your case and go outside your bedroom and play around people-that is the point at which you sell out. The time that you start offering it to other people, whatever the price, whatever the cost. Yeah, sure, you might want to share it with other people, so going along with that, you

always want as many people to at least have the chance to hear what your ideas are as possible. It reaches a break-even point, and after that, you're picking up a lot of dead weight where there's a lot of people who-God, they might as well listen to something else for all they're getting out of it. But, yeah, it's part of your job, if you're an entertainer, to reach as many people as you feel comfortable with.

MS: You said you left town when you quit Husker Du?

GH: I went on vacation.

MS: Are you still heralded in Minneapolis or are you having any problems there since the break-up?

GH: I would say that I pretty much, whether trying or not, stayed with the music community by participation in other people's gigs, by just being there, whereas the other members of Husker Du, if they came to town, it would be somewhat of a surprise for people to see them, because they're not around. It's easier not to be bothered by people because of your rank as a musician if you are visible a lot of the time. People don't say, "Wow, it's Grant." It's like, "Oh, hi Grant." I've got friends. I don't have to go looking.

MS: Back to the Land Speed Record quote ... Does that mean that you all were at one time junkies?

GH: Oh, no. During Land Speed Record, we took speed orally. And before I started to get a harness on my habit, I was doing fourteen bags of heroin a day.

MS: You're OK now?

GH: Quite fine.

MS: That's good.

GH: It took a little work. As a matter of fact, I tried going to Narcotics Anonymous and stuff like that. The worst thing about it is-let's put it this way: drugs are manufactured by criminals; they don't have any standards. I'm not pro- or anti- drug. It's just that, considering the way a lot of people take them, drugs aren't that safe. To go back to NA, it's a sad fact, but the worst thing for people trying to stop is to have a support group with other ex-users. Then you become part of a chain where the weakest link will someday break. Someone will say, "Hey, you know where I can cop today?", at a fuckin' Narcotics Anonymous meeting, and whether you do cop or not, you think about doing it. The psychological addiction is hardest. Pretty soon the anxiety melds into more energy.

MS: Well, you have this newfound freedom. You're obviously the main member of the band downstairs. What are you going

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DR. WAX RECORDS

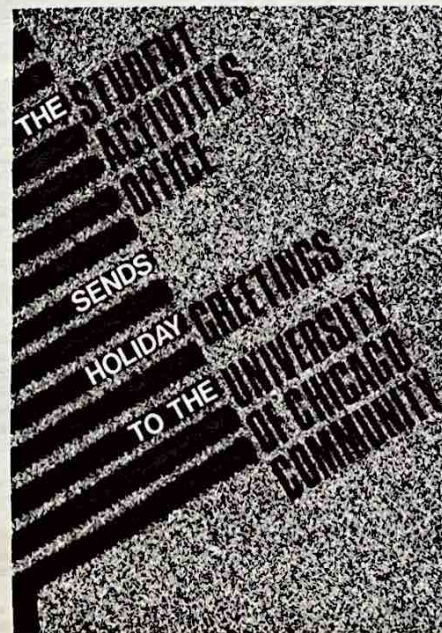
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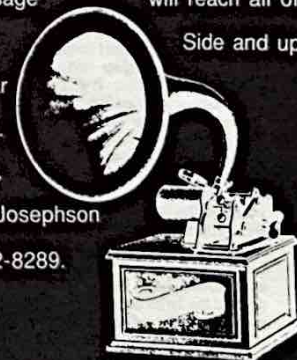
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Savage Republic began when four UCLA students pooled their creative resources during the early part of this decade. Despite numerous personnel changes, the band has evolved and is today recognized as a leader in alternative music. After releasing singles on the Independent Project label, Savage Republic turned out one mesmerizing work after another, including their ep *Trudge* and a double live album, *Trek*. Their latest lp, *Jamahiriya Democratique et Populaire de Sauvage* (Fundamental), will no doubt be recognized as one of the finest albums of 1988. **WHPK's Tom Braden** spoke with bandmembers Bruce Licher, Thom Furman, Ethan Port, and Philip Drucker about the past, the present, and the future of Savage Republic.

TB: Your latest album is called *Jamahiriya Democratique et Populaire de Sauvage*. Could you explain the title?

BL: Roughly translated, Jamahiriya means "Revolutionary Republic." It's sort of politically tongue in cheek. Translated, it means the People's Democratic Republic of Savage ...

EP: ... of Sausage ...

BL: The idea behind it is that there are a lot of countries in the world that call themselves People's Democratic Republics without necessarily being what you would expect a PDR would be. We figured, well, we're as much one as anybody else is, if not more so. And we like the word "Jamahiriya," it has a nice ring to it. It makes it seem a little more obscure. That was sort of an idea with the band from the beginning, to create something that's a little more obscure, that you kind of have to figure out, "What is this?"

TB: So you prefer oblique statements?

BL: Sometimes ...

TB: A lot of your music seems to be like that; it seems to have an implicit political or social message, but you do so many instrumentals that it'd be hard to accuse you of putting your message before the music. When there are lyrics, like in "Andalusia" [from *Ceremonial*], how specific are those lyrics?

EP: Those were written by Louise; that was after the music was already written ...

BL: The music is almost always written first, and the lyrics are added later. Usually they are written by the person who delivers them. Robert and Louise did most of the lyrics on *Ceremonial*; Louise was just a side person we asked to sing on that one song; Robert was in the band for a period of time. Neither of them are working with us any more.

EP: "Andalusia" was a whole different tack for the band. That song was completely different from any of the other Savage Republic songs.

TB: Your hit pop single?

EP: Just quieter, more folksy ...

TB: Jamahiriya seems a lot more stripped down than *Ceremonial*, which had a lot of background keyboards, and more songs with multiple basses rather than multiple guitars.

BL: There's actually a lot more overdubs on a lot of the songs on the new album than there were on *Ceremonial*. There's a lot more different things going on; it's just that the keyboards filled things out in a different direction, and then the studio that we went into and the engineer that we had made it a very different thing.

TF: It [the *Ceremonial* studio] was too weird of a studio for what we were doing. We went in 24-track this time again ...

BL: ... in a garage ...

TF: ... not the quality 24-track. It was a good studio for what we were doing.

TB: It sounded a lot more like a live show--less doctored than *Ceremonial*.

EP: The later mixes came out better than some of the earlier ones ...

BL: Yeah, we ended up remixing about half of *Ceremonial*. The remixes are on the U.K. edition, and there's supposed to be a new edition of it in the U.S., but I don't think they've pressed any of them yet. The new mixes have a little more energy to them.

TB: Do you play music from all your albums live?

EP: We don't play that much from *Ceremonial* anymore. We play "Year of Exile" ...

BL: Yeah, that's about the only one ... Right now, about half to two-thirds of the set is from the new album. We do "Year of Exile" usually, and then two or three things from the first album. We've occasionally done a couple of things off of *Trudge*, but it's not a normal part of the set.

TB: You seem to do a lot of switching instruments live. Are you all multi-instrumental?

BL: Most of the band is, yeah. Most of the things that we play are not that difficult to play, so it's pretty easy to switch. But everybody has kind of a different way of playing each instrument, which keeps it interesting.

TB: A lot of your music seems to reflect that ... There aren't many flashy solos where one person is in the spotlight ...

EP: Actually we're getting a little more flashy ... Greg's playing a little more.

TF: I think Brad's really changed the complexion of the band.

TB: He's playing drums?

TF: Yeah, he's a drummer.

TB: He's also a guitarist.



TF: Brad's probably the most all-around musician in the band ...

EP: Brad can play any instrument.

BL: He played some other things in the studio. He did some keyboards in "Il Papa Simpatico" and "Pios dem Milo," which is the Theodorakis song. There are two cover songs on the new album. One is the "Viva le Rock and Roll" single ...

EP: Brad used a synthesizer; he treated my guitar on "Tabula Rasa" ...

BL: "Viva le Rock and Roll" was originally recorded by Alternative TV, off their first album, in '78 or so, and then the other song, "Pios dem Milo," is another song from the soundtrack of the movie *Z* by the Greek composer Theodorakis. We had done a cover of another song which was the flipside of a single we put out in 1983.

TB: With Greek covers and song titles like "Lebanon 2000" and "Dionysius," you seem to have a real affinity for the Mediterranean.

BL: After our European tour we were definitely all converted to Greek salads.

TB: How was your reception in Europe?

BL: We were received pretty well in most places. Greece was definitely the high

point of the tour ... We had one show in Thessalonica that had three times as many people as any other show we did in Europe. Part of the reason is that they don't get too many bands coming down there, and there has been a lot of interest in the band there.

TB: They can find your records there?

BL: Yeah, they're distributed there and now they're also starting to be licensed down there. We're licensing the *Tragic Figures* lp to a company in Greece, but they also wanted to include that single that had the Greek song on it.

TB: Did you listen to much Greek or Middle Eastern music when you started?

BL: Some of us did. When the band first started, we were all at UCLA. Actually Phil and I are the only two original members that are still in the band. There were a lot of Iranian people there; the collage on the back cover was made from all the posters that Phil tore down from around the school.

TB: Political posters?

BL: Yeah.

EP: Greg and I were in a band; we were doing the same thing. "Lebanon 2000" is

actually an old song of ours--it was written in 1981, right when Savage Republic started.

TB: What was this other band?

EP: Well, it was called Uh; now it's called Uranium Hope.

TB: I always thought one of the things that made your music sound kind of middle-eastern was the way all the instruments, the guitars and the basses, were playing whole melodies, whereas in most rock the guitar is playing chords, and the bass is just in a supporting role.

BL: I think we've always tried to use basses as more melodic instruments--not just having them create a rhythm, but having them be more of an integral part of whatever's going on in the song. On the guitars, we have four differently tuned guitars that we use, and they combine in different ways. So sometimes we'll have a song where there'll be two basses and one guitar, and sometimes there'll be one bass and three guitars. We approach each song uniquely, like, "What does this song need to become what it needs to be?"

TB: Do you write them together?

BL: Usually we just get together and start playing. Somebody will have an idea or a riff and everyone else will join in and work with it.

EP: It's about half and half, I think ...

TB: *Ceremonial* seems more thickly arranged ...

TF: Robert did a lot of the arranging--he's no longer with us.

PD: He did a lot of the overarranging.

BL: On several of the larger pieces on the new album we would go in with a very rough idea of what the song was going to be, then we laid it down and built in in the studio, so that we didn't know what it was going to sound like when we finished it. "Tabula Rasa" is a song like that, and also the last one, "Jamahiriya."

TB: Do you play those live?

BL: We've been playing "Tabula Rasa" live, and as a result it's one of those songs where it's different every time. "Jamahiriya" we haven't played live, although I'd like to--we just haven't gotten around to rehearsing it. "Trudge" was another song that was that way--we just hit on a version in the studio ...

EP: That was the second take. We got really lucky with that.

BL: You get about two-thirds of the way through, and you go, "This is it, this is it, don't blow it." Those songs are sometimes difficult to pull off live. On the first album there were a couple of songs ... you know, you have the tape recorder going and you get something that's really unique. "Kill the Fascists" is another--that particular version that's on the record, we could never do it as good as that, although there are other versions that are very interesting, and very different. You can't just play it the same way every time ...

PD: ... or you never quite get drunk the same way twice.

TB: How much practicing do you do? I haven't heard the new stuff live, but even on something intricate like "Year of Exile," you seem pretty tight.

TF: "Year of Exile" is ten times better live than it is on record. I think it's by far the best song on that record, but now I think it's our best song live. It's always different.

BL: "Year of Exile" has four sections to it; the first and the third sections are always different. We never know how long they're going to be or how they're going to come together. The second and the fourth parts are pretty much set. We all have to paying attention to what everyone else is doing on stage ...

TB: ... and hopefully be able to hear each other. Do you ever have problems with bad engineers?

EP: Ninety percent of the time.

BL: Yeah, part of the problem is being

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able to hear yourself on stage, but also if we don't have a soundman who's familiar with our music, because the music is put together in a different way, and there's unusual instruments—a lot of times they don't know what to do with them.

EP: On tour we've had sound people, like in New York, who got really pissed off when they saw the two basses.

TB: *What do they think of the oil drum?*

EP: The oil drum just clinches it.

TF: On your earlier question about practicing—we practice less than probably any other band. We pay, I think, dearly at times for not rehearsing, but once you get on tour, it's great, because you burn out on the songs as it is. Because we don't practice too much before we go out, by the fourth or fifth show things come together. I don't know, this next tour of Europe is two months long. We might need to take a break or something.

EP: Half the songs always end up a lot better live than the recorded version. When we went into the studio for this record, we were rushing to get it out. We didn't wait three months to play those songs live before we recorded them. "Lethal Musk" is a lot better now—we sort of figured out how to play it.

TB: *There aren't any of the kind of long epics like on the second side of Ceremonial this time.*

EP: That was intentional.

TB: *You got tired of that?*

TF: "Jamahiriya" is pretty long ...

BL: ... so is "Tabula Rasa", but you couldn't call them epics ...

EP: We intentionally cut them shorter, because we've already done the ten-minute epic, and it gets boring to people who don't know about the band.

TF: You can put people to sleep live, unless it's like "Year of Exile" where there's so many changes.

EP: It gets boring for us to play, too, if we're there so long. But I think we just all became better musicians, actually.

TB: *You're often pegged as an "industrial" band.*

EP: I think there are more subtle influences than that. I know that me and Greg were heavily influenced by Throbbing Gristle and 23 Skidoo, and bands like that. So even though we're playing more conventional instruments there is some of that.

BL: Everybody brings a different influence into it. There is that industrial influence, but it doesn't make us an industrial band.

TF: It depends on your definition of industrial. There's part of the band that

would like to go in that direction, and their side projects reflect that.

TB: *Do you all have side projects?*

TF: Everybody. Everybody has two ... Everybody and their mother has side projects.

TB: *Brad has Steaming Coils ...*

TF: There's Uh, and 17 Pygmies, and Sotto Voce, and Autumn Fair.

TB: *Are they all putting out records?*

TF: Slowly but surely.

TB: *I usually think of Industrial bands as experimenting to find radical new textures; you seem to have found a sound and more or less stuck with it.*

BL: We're not constantly altering the guitar sounds ...

EP: We don't use samplers or keyboards that much, we go for more traditional instrumentation, and then we change the sound.

TB: *You work much more with actual musical pitches than, say, early Sonic Youth, where there's hardly any notes at all.*

EP: We get compared to Sonic Youth all the time because we use alternate tunings, but we've always been a lot more ...

TF: We're a little more musical. I wouldn't say we're better.

EP: They've gotten a lot more musical. They're poppier than us, now.

TF: The Swans are doing the same thing—they don't beat people over the head as much.

TB: *Do you think that kind of change is inevitable?*

TF: Well, as bands go through changes ...

<<< A particularly loud train passes by >>>

TF: I think musician/artists, bricklayers, whatever you want to call them, go through changes where they feel they have to get musical. They say, "I've been making this noise, but it's too simple," but then a lot of people go back to that. I wish a lot of people, like Wire, would. I find that with what I'm doing ... I was doing this Autumn Fair record a year ago, and it was really keyboard-y, kind of ambient, which is nice, but after a while I said, "This isn't where it's at." Because of personal changes in my life, I wanted to get more anger out of me. You come full circle, and I think we've come full circle. We got some things out of our system—we had to make that change, do more ambient stuff. But now we're more hard-edged.

TB: *I don't know if this was typical, but the time I saw you play, there was a lot of visual stuff, a lot of fire.*

EP: That show was a little different. Since it was out in a parking lot, I went all-out pyrotechnics.

TB: *Do you usually have fire like*

that?

EP: There was a show before that in May where we had these forty-foot flames and two gallons of gas. But aside from that it's usually a little more controlled.

BL: Ethan is usually the keeper of the fire, so there usually is some fire at the show. It's usually not very much.

TB: *Does this ever cause problems?*

TF: We almost set the sprinklers off at UCLA a couple of years ago ... On our second U.S. tour, after getting hit in my ears by caps, and stomping out flames behind my amp, I'd had it with Ethan, and I laid down the law. But that was the end of the tour, so he had his fun.

TB: *Is it just for fun, or does it add something to the show?*

TF: I think it adds a lot ...

BL: ... when it works.

EP: I just need Greg and Thom to say, "Maybe you should only use half that amount." But I've found a safer way of doing things.

BL: A lot of times Ethan or I will go out and find palm leaves or pampas grass ... On the last U.S. tour, we were going out in each town and we would try to find some sort of foliage that we would dress the stage with. For a while, we were finding that was kind of interesting: we still do it occasionally. I kind of like the idea when we're on tour, where we're finding something in each town and bringing it to the show. We've been on a couple of tours where we couldn't take the oil drum with us, so in each town before soundcheck, we'd go out and look for an oil drum, and ninety-five percent of the time we'd find it.

EP: Half the time it was full of garbage or human waste, though.

TB: *Do you have any plans to tour the United States?*

TF: Personally, I'd like to. But it's just more feasible to do Europe, because we go over a lot better there, we get treated a lot better. Would you rather play for thirteen people in Detroit or for five hundred in Athens?

TB: *Why do you think you draw that much better over there?*

EP: Because they didn't get a hold of the original version of *Ceremonial* ...

TF: It depends; we're a word of mouth band. We have this big image—we're not out there calling radio stations. We have a mystique about us there.

EP: Plus the band was basically a rumor; the records weren't widely available in Europe. When we toured last year, all the records came out, and now the new one's coming out. Here we've gone three years with nothing happening.

TF: Until the last year we've really lacked continuity. Only in the past year we've become more of a working band.

BL: But even that's a little questionable

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WHPK
PROGRAM GUIDE
RELEASE PARTY
TUESDAY
DECEMBER 6
GUEST DJ: J.P. CHILL
THE DISCO RECONSTRUCTIONIST
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WELL DRINKS
ALL NIGHT LONG
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DOWNSTAIRS FROM CABARET METRO

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TRUTH, FICTION, AND MECOLODICS



With their first two albums, *Joe Baiza and the Universal Congress Of Prosperous and Qualified* on SST Records, the Universal Congress Of began to turn the ears both of alternative rock fans and of intrepid jazzbos. Their latest release, an EP entitled *This is Mecolodics*, goes one step further in a similar direction, covering Ornette Coleman's "Law Years" as well as showcasing some of their most intriguing jazz-oriented compositions to date. Their sax-laden renditions of "All Your Love" by Otis Rush and "Happy Birthday" also help

prove that this is anything but another trendy, obnoxious record coming out of L.A. The band consists of Joe Baiza, whom Saccharine Trust fans already know and love, on guitar and occasional vocals; Ralph Gorodetsky on bass; Jason Kahn on drums; and Steve Moss on tenor and occasional harmonica and vocals. *WHPK's Marianne Potje* asked the questions. This interview is best enjoyed over a bottle of a nice rich brew in a noisy environment, if possible, since that's how it was originally conducted.

MP: I gathered from reading another interview that you're sort of reluctant to describe mecolodics. Is there a reason for that? Is it true?

JB: What do you mean? I'm not reluctant.

MP: That's why you're not telling me.

JB: You didn't ask.

RG: It's a very complex system of musical notation. That's why he's reluctant, you know?

JB: It's not a thing you can describe, it's something you just know.

RG: Feel.

JB: Yeah. I guess that's the easiest way to put it.

MP: You explain it well enough in the liner notes, I think.

JB: Yeah, that should do it.

MP: You say you don't want to "harness the raging, pure energy." Now if you're not going to harness it, how do you write the music down? Or do you even write it down?

JB: The structured parts of the music, yeah. (JK unsuccessfully tries to vocalize laughter) I'll tell you why Jason's laughing—he's the one who wrote the liner notes.

JK: It's all fiction! ... Oh, there was some truth in it, though.

JB: Well, it was based on a mecolodic conversation we had, actually. Jason and I ... Were we drinking that night or something?

JK: Yeah, heavily.

JB: Yeah, we got together and said, "Let's work on the liner notes," so we just got drunk and started talking into the tape recorder. He went home and sort of sifted through it and came up with that.

MP: Now we know the real story.

JB: Well, it's fiction mixed in with some truth.

JK: Like life.

RG: You can apply the same thing to mecolodics in general, I think.

JB: Yeah. Like, in the liner notes, Sal was really my grandmother's boyfriend, who played trumpet, which is true. But his name wasn't Sal; I can't remember what it was.

RG: It's Sal now.

SM: He was a mariachi player?

JB: Well, he was a crazy guy. He was a be-bop, Latin be-bop kind of guy, an interesting character. He got me interested in music early on, but my parents wouldn't buy me a trumpet.

MP: What's the difference between mecolodics—what you're doing now—and just general collective improvisation—what people have been doing for years?

SM: Mecolodics got soul, that's what it is.

RG: You're going to upset somebody!

SM: Mecolodics is funnier, I think.

JK: It's based more on chance.

RG: Some nights, the mecos come out all over the place.

JB: Say you got a thing you're doing, a structure, and you're following that route ... and then something happens. Somebody puts a stone in the road or something, the wind's blowing real hard and you get blown off the course. You end up going down another trail somewhere. With mecolodics, you just use it. We use mistakes.

SM: Yeah, you say, "I think we're lost, but let's keep going!"

JK: Sometimes mistakes create whole new ideas. (To JB) Maybe you should explain what a meco is.

MP: There is such an entity as a "meco"?

RG: Mecolodics, oh yeah!

JB: It's just a word.

RG: I think you can get a better definition in the Hispanic neighborhood.

JB: It's a slang word that I picked up in junior high. I don't even want to say what it means—I don't think I should. But somehow it got brought up again recently, so I started using it again. It's some kind of slang word that gangs used to use when I was a teenager.

MP: When you first began listening to jazz, whenever that was, what drew you to Ornette Coleman instead of anybody else, anybody earlier?

JB: Well, I originally started listening to Charlie Parker, be-bop. I was reading some Kerouac, and I'd read about the kind of music they would listen to. And I said, "What's this be-bop stuff? Jazz." Well, I didn't really like jazz then. Then I heard Charlie Parker and I went, "Whoa!" It was great—this was during the punk rock era, so guys were playing this fast punk music, and I would go, "Listen to this—this is even faster than a punk rock song!" They wouldn't agree with me ...

MP: But what was it about that Ornette that drew you all towards him, specifically on your last record?

JB: Well, he's one of the originators of harmolodic music.

JK: I like him because he mixes a really lyrical sound with improvisation. A lot of guys that just improvise, it doesn't stick in your craw.

JB: He has a certain tone that goes in you, too.

JK: Yeah, really plaintive.

SM: His tone, it can be real beautiful, and it can be real raucous and driving.

JK: And there's always a lot of humor in his music, too.

SM: Yeah, a lot of humor, a lot of feeling. And his spirit is real adventuresome; he's not afraid to try

anything.

JB: Just in his history, the way he got to where he got and the chances he took to get there.

JK: And he's real honest.

JB: Right. And, my God, what he had to go through to do that. And he actually made a breakthrough, made a lot of changes.

SM: He persisted for so long, now he's got beautiful suits. We like the way he dresses, too.

RG: There's also something—I think he's going to have a lot of influence. We were sitting in a club last night and they were playing some tape, what was it, the Tar Babies? And we heard the song "Dance in Your Head." A lot of people are going to pick up on it.

MP: According to the liner notes, "Happy Birthday" was going to be the first appearance of mecolodic lyrics, but you cut them off ...

All: Ohh, yeah ...

JK: See, now you're digging up some truth in there.

JB: Actually, Jason sang "Happy Birthday" over it, so in the master tapes there's a vocal on it as well.

RG: He says it's erased but we know it isn't.

SM: It's brilliant! It's brilliant.

JK: It's been erased, but ...

SM: No, it hasn't been erased! I happen to know it still exists.

JK: You don't know shit.

JB: See, Jason tried to lie to Steve because Steve wanted it to be released that way so badly.

JK: It's dangerous—you can't release something like that.

RG: Too much, it was too much.

SM: It's fuckin' great is what it is. By God, the kids would love it! Why, they'd eat it up, I'm tellin' ya!

MP: Very few of your songs have lyrics at all, and when they do, the vocals seem pretty far back in the mix. Is that intentional?

JB: We're just starting to write words now. I've been studying real hard; I can handwrite now and I carry a dictionary with me.

JK: He can read his driver's license.

MP: What I meant was, do you sit down and think to yourself, "This song is not going to have lyrics at all?"

JB: No, it just happens that way. Ralph writes a lot of lyrics, and I'm starting to write some. You just go, "Oh, let's write a song with words." Or somebody will come up with a song and you just feel, OK, it's an instrumental, because of the way the song is.

SM: Personally, I don't care about words. You want words, go read a poem. This is music.

MP: Well, that's what I've been starting to think, too. Some

words are too catchy and you kind of ignore what's behind them.

SM: I think, well, you can never understand the words on a record anyway ...

MP: Or if you do, they're stupid ...

RG: Well, a lot of the music behind that is probably also stupid.

JB: We don't feel hard-pressed to either write lyrics or not write them; it's whatever comes up.

MP: Will there continue to be this much of a jazz influence in your future records?

JB: It's hard to say, really. I'm sure there will be.

SM: I'd put my money on it.

JB: We like to keep it open.

RG: It's all groove music. It has a certain feel to it ... depending on how we play it.

SM: We'll play anything that sounds bitchin', man.

MP: Now, supposedly Kurt Weill said that he didn't believe in any categories of music—there's just good and bad music. Does that sound like a plausible idea to you, that there aren't or shouldn't be any categories?

RG: That's the way most people approach it. I mean, when you hear heavy metal, it's heavy metal. It's unfortunate, but I think that a lot of musicians listen to a fairly narrow spectrum of music and reproduce exactly what they hear, so a lot of bands sound exactly the same. There really are categories, though I think there's good and bad within any of them. I like Metallica even though we don't sound a whole hell of a lot like them.

SM: But describing music with words is real imperfect anyway.

JK: "Good" and "bad" are really not ...

JB: That can be subjective, too.

MP: I think Weill felt he had the right to decide.

RG: Well, he's dead anyhow.

JK: I liked his music. That's my criteria—what I like and don't like.

MP: What kinds of music have you been listening to?

JK: A lot of rap artists: De La Soul, Erik B & Rakim, Public Enemy, Big Daddy Kane. When I listen to the radio, that's what I listen to—I don't listen to anything else. And then if I buy records, it's jazz or blues.

MP: Does it seem as if live shows are on the decline?

SM: Yeah, it does to me.

RG: It varies, you know. There's a scene where you can just go out and different things are happening ... like the Anti-Club or certain scenes ... We go to what we find interesting and we make up

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MECOLODICS

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half the audience, unfortunately.

JK: A lot of it is technology now. When I first started going to clubs ten years ago, people didn't have VCR's and they couldn't just stay home.

SM: People aren't as excited about bands anymore.

JK: Feels more like the middle '70's to me now.

JB: Yeah, I think it's a really bad time right now.

RG: Part of it has to do with the prevalence of fairly uninteresting music.

SM: I think it's going to be a lot better after President Quayle gets in. After Bush croaks I think there's going to be a lot more anger ...

JK: People are going to be pissed off!

SM: ... and confusion and excitement, and people are going to say, "We're all going to be dead in like a year, we gotta do something!"

JK: Just blow the top off the motherfucker!

MP: What was the audience's reaction to the last show you played in Chicago?

JK: Well, they enjoyed it. People always like us!

SM: But it's true. A lot of people actually wept ...

(Everyone howls with laughter.)

JK: I was crying! That was after your solo, right?

JB: They wept and then they left Steve a \$40 tip.

JK: Stuffed down his horn.

SM: As a matter of fact there was one young tenor student who actually chopped his hands right off.

JK: Weren't those his lips he chopped off?

SM: Yes, actually it was his lips. The guy's been following me around ever since. I can't even understand what he says. He goes, "Wbb blbb mb ..." What? Write it down for me.

JB: It was a good show. There were not a lot of people, but they all enjoyed it, and we had a good time.

JK: Not to sound arrogant when we say people like us ...

MP: Are there certain songs you prefer to do live?

JB: I think it depends on the audience. Sometimes we're playing for an audience that's real active and they want to hear something that's kind of ...

JK: They want to get down!

JB: So, OK, we give them that. And sometimes we play to an audience who's kind of relaxing a bit ...

RG: Introspective ...

JB: So we say, "Let's pull this out."

MP: So it might be a different show every night.

JK: It is, usually.

RG: Even if it's the same songs!

SM: Some songs we play just about every night.

RG: The staples.

MP: People would be mad if you didn't play them.

RG: No, it's just the ones we know.

JK: We don't play "Joey" every night. We don't want to scare anyone.

MP: In the studio, do you record everything in one or two takes?

JB: That's how we did this last record. There aren't very many overdubs. Plus, the room we recorded in was a really live-sounding room. We try to get the natural sound of the instruments, the actual playing.

SM: Also, we couldn't afford to do too many takes.

JB: I think it sounds more human that way. I'd like to record in the spring again. When we get back, we'll be working on our new material. We have a lot of little seeds of songs.

SM: We have to go back and water them a little bit.

MP: Well, since I have no more questions, is there anything you want to add?

JB: Mecolodice yourself in '88!

SM: Stretch your ears out.

JK: And don't believe the hype!

FIGURES

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because it's really going to be difficult for most of us to go on this tour. To take two months off, most everybody's quitting jobs. For me to leave my business is really difficult. I wonder if I'm even going to have a business when I come back.

We're really at a point where we're not making any money. We might actually make some money on this tour, but it's still a big chunk of life. That's one of the reasons that there isn't any serious thought of doing a U.S. tour; most of the band can't afford to. The longest we've been out on the road is four weeks, and now we're going to Europe for twice that. I know there are other bands that do much longer tours ...

TB: Some of them are self-supporting.

TF: We could be, too. It depends on how much you want it. If you're the Butthole Surfers, you're going to go out and do whatever it takes.

EP: They lived in a van for a year. They didn't make any money for a year. They aren't doing anything much different from what they used to do but people didn't dig them at all, until they came back over and

over again. Finally, like the sixth time around, all these burned-out surfers said, "Hey, this is cool."

TB: Maybe this album will do the same for you.

TF: We're not in a position to get that much farther than we are.

EP: We'll never be an SST band, touring six months out of the year in a van. If, in 1983, the band hadn't broken up, and had gone on a six-month tour, they would have been really famous then. That was the time to go.

PD: You wouldn't have said that then.

EP: Well, the band wasn't in any shape to go.

TB: Did either of you [Bruce and Phil], when all this started, have any idea where it would end up?

BL: No. The band was always on the verge of breaking up. When the first album came out, the band had pretty much broken up. We decided, "Well, let's put the record out, what the hell." We were just hoping to sell the thousand copies we made. Then two weeks later a distributor bought eight hundred and fifty of them, and two weeks after that Rough Trade wanted more, and I had to borrow more money and do a second pressing.

HART

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

to do with this freedom?

GH: It's going to kind of dictate itself once we get going a little bit here. The only thing I have to base any sort of goals on is a project that eventually failed very badly.

MS: It didn't fail. Maybe it went on longer than it should have, but it didn't fail. The records are there, as well as the influence ... What are you going to do with that video you're taping downstairs?

GH: The cameraman wanted to do it for his own purposes, and let's put it this way, if he were to do anything with it, it wouldn't go too far without us finding out about it. It's worth it to us just to have that document. I try to record every show that we have anything to do with. I'm into archiving things a little bit, especially right now when it's very formative.

MS: If you have anything else to say, go for it.

GH: Those things don't normally come to me until the middle of the next night, and then I wake up.



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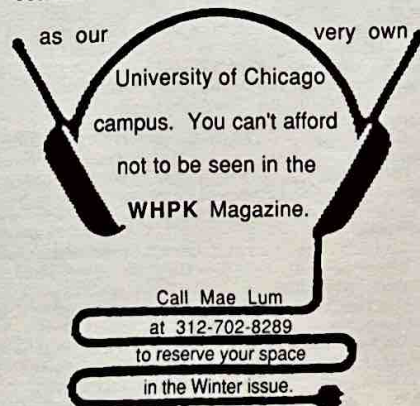
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BREAKER

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they should do. We went in the studio together and worked on it together.

JC: *You were engineering more than anything else?*

K: Yeah. I supplied my taste in engineering.

JC: *That was the same thing with Davey and LaDonna, right?*

K: A little less with them. With improvised music, nuances and subtleties are much less apparent, you know—they have to be placed properly. It has to be good in the context of the record. Like I say, good music doesn't make a good record. So most of what I did with Davey and LaDonna was putting my energy into making a great record. They made the great music, but I made the great listening experience.

(At this point, David Licht enters the milieu.)

JC: *How did you both discover improvised music?*

DL: I met Eugene (Chadbourne) at the Creative Music Studio in Canada in '78. At the time, I hadn't heard that much improvised music before, but after that ...

K: I also went up to the Creative Music Studio in 1978, but I went up with Doug Bailey records and Evan Parker records under my arm. I was telling everybody, "Listen to this, listen to this," and people would kind of leave me alone. Then Eugene came up there, like David just said, and we all thought he was the end of the world. Most everybody else at the school just walked out of his class after the first five minutes. He just said he was going to make a score, and he wanted everyone to watch him draw this score, but he drew a bunch of little cartoons and stupid pictures on a blackboard and had the orchestra just do things to the pictures. People thought he was a fool or a joker or something, but I knew it was somebody we had to play with. I didn't really know David at the time; it took me a while to learn to appreciate his skills. We started as the Chadbournes, and that became Shockabilly, and there you go.

JC: *Do you sense an antipathy between those people who continue to do strictly improvised music and people who have crossed over into rock?*

K: That's a tough thing to talk about, because all those people are my friends. I love what they do in a certain way, but in another way, I'm not excited by it anymore. Sometimes I think about how they may be standing still, and sometimes I think about how far ahead of me they are, that they can continue to use such intellectual processes and come up with

the results they like, and so successfully ... People like John Zorn and Christian Marclay. I'd love to hear Christian in a rap band, loud as shit. I've heard Zorn that loud, and I know that works.

JC: *Bongwater features a lot of diverse people.*

K: I was working in the studio on my own music and had this really strong desire to collaborate with Ann Magnuson. I brought her in to hear some of the things and she came up with what I thought were great ideas for lyrics, an area which at the time I wasn't getting anywhere with. That's why we started working together. It was more of a studio project—people like Samm Bennett, Chris Cochrane were involved—that turned into a band later.

JC: *You still bring in people—Don Cherry was on (Bongwater's latest album) Double Bummer.*

K: All the tracks that he was on were done a long time ago. Some of the tracks on the record were recorded as long ago as 1985.

JC: *So now you want to work as a basic unit, without anyone else—just as a band?*

K: I don't know what I'm doing here, if that's what you mean, on the road. I just wanted to get out on stage again, and then suddenly people started asking us to come. I don't have any theme, really, to all of this. With my work in the studio, there's a real privacy, a dedication, an atmosphere that I create that nobody else can get into. Out here, it's sort of like being at home, except you're moving hundreds of miles a day.

JC: *You're not touring with Ann Magnuson. How much do you have to adjust on the road?*

K: It's no adjustment whatsoever. It's just cacaphony, brevity, and any bit of attention. You just have to have fun for forty-five minutes, and that happens with or without her. It is a little more wordy with her. You know, this is the first time we've been out in the United States in three years, since Shockabilly, and it's a weird feeling for us. We got one hour out of New York City, and David and I just looked at each other and we were both thinking of just turning around ... It was very close, it was strange. The traffic was going ten miles an hour, and we didn't want to be going in that direction. We're here because people asked us to come, and because we're going to Europe in three weeks and we need to raise the money to buy plane tickets. Of course, being on stage the one hour is fantastic, but there's nothing fascinating about the other twenty-three hours.

JC: *On the other hand, going to Europe is a bit more attractive.*

K: It's not a bourgeois vacationary event, not at all. The first time I went, I was like a child going to Disneyland, but now it's a way to really accomplish things. We'll make good money there, and we're

treated like kings, but it is hard work. There's a Shimmydisc in Holland now, and it's off to a flying start—the recognition is just amazing, everyone knows what's going on. It's more attractive to go to a place where everyone knows what's going on because you can accomplish so much more.

JC: *I understand that you'll be playing in Poland. What kind of reception are you expecting?*

K: I expect something weird to happen. Fred Frith went there, and he told me that the police came about two hours before he was supposed to play and closed the place down. So they set up another venue the next night and spread it by word of mouth. It was in a basement, with one light bulb, and the place was filled.

We're being paid 40,000 zlotys—that's about \$125—per show, for four shows. And I'll have to spend it before I leave, or else open a Polish bank account. Then we'll be in England for five days. We may do a John Peel show while we're there.

JC: *You'll come out on one of those records that all look the same.*

K: Someday, maybe. But this is the third time I've been offered a Peel session, and I haven't gotten one yet. We'll see.

JC: *Are you playing as a unit over there?*

K: Well, it's B.A.L.L. and Bongwater, come to think of it.

JC: *So, what's coming up on Shimmydisc?*

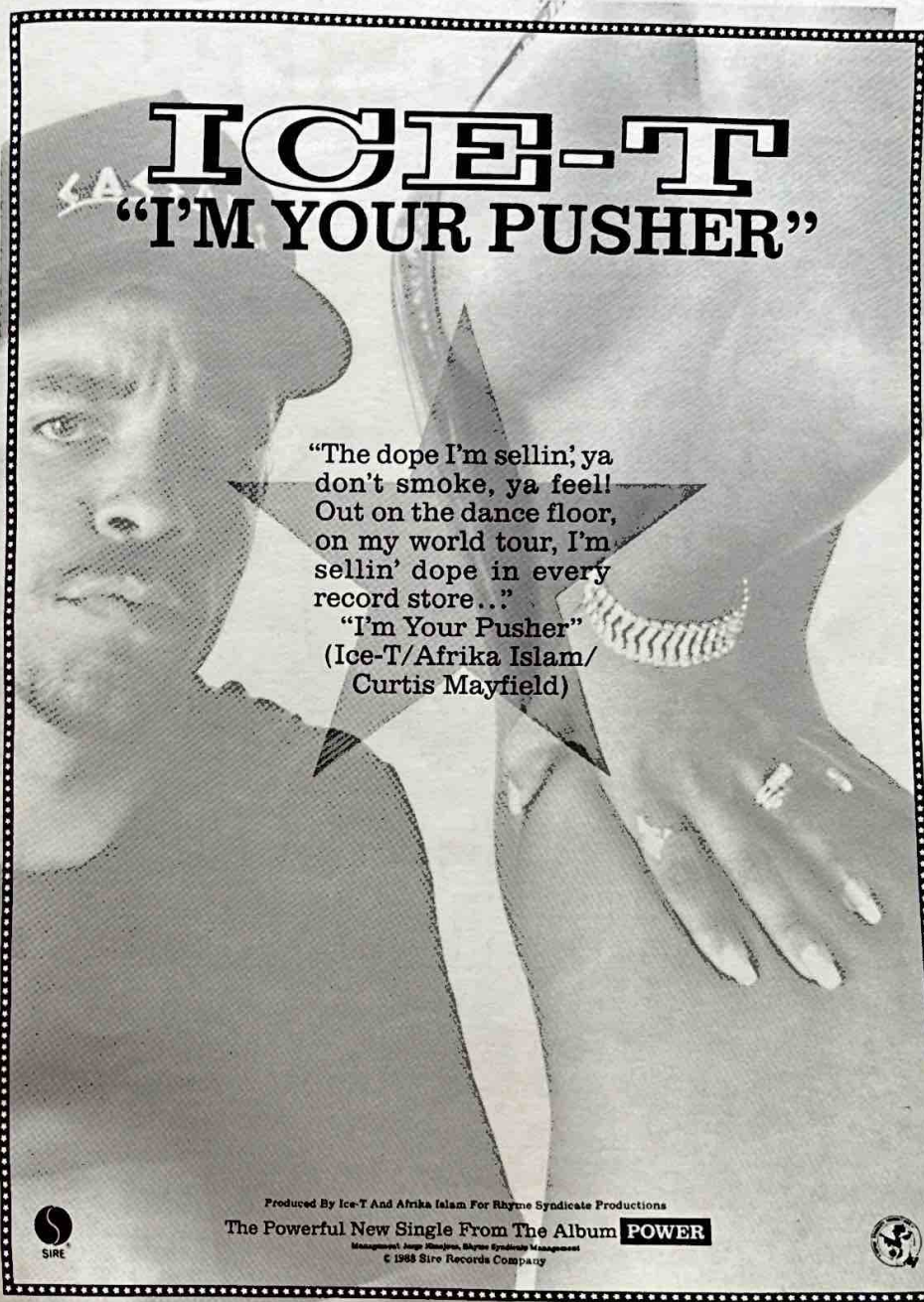
K: I'm rereleasing Fred Lane's first album around Christmas, *From the One That Cut You*. They originally pressed only eight hundred of them. Then he's coming to New York around January or February to record a new record with Davey and LaDonna and a couple of other people. Also, the new King Missile record, *They*; the new B.A.L.L. record, *Bird*, which has a really great cover; and a record by Spongehead—do you remember a song by the Spongehead Experience, from *The 20th Anniversary of the Summer of Love* (first Shimmydisc release), they did Hendrix's "Love or Confusion"? Their first lp is coming out, called *Potted Meat Spread*. Then some Velvet Monkeys remixes, and Shockabilly rereleases—*The Dawn of Shockabilly*, *Earth vs. Shockabilly*. Those were never available in the United States.

JC: *Are relations with Eugene Chadbourne ...*

K: I don't know, are they? (Pause) I haven't really figured it out yet. All I know is, we're releasing the record, and we've come to terms on that. The rest of it, I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine. We're not enemies.

JC: *Is there anything else you want to talk about?*

K: Yeah. Don't smoke cigarettes, unless you want to look cool.



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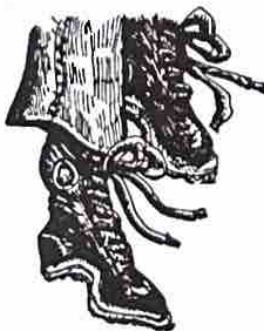
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